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A

CATECHISM

ON THE

CONSTITUTION AND GOVERNMENT

OF

CHRISTIAN CHURCHES.

By JOHN ROAF.

PREPARED AND PRINTED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE CONGREGATIONAL UNION OF UPPER CANADA.

"*He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.*"—Rev. ii. 7.

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EXTRACTS FROM THE MINUTES

OF THE

COMMITTEE

OF THE

CONGREGATIONAL UNION OF UPPER CANADA.

SEPTEMBER 14, 1838.—Resolved unanimously, "That the Rev. John Roaf be requested to compile a Catechism illustrative of the scriptural authority & discipline, as well as beneficial tendencies of Congregationalism."

JULY 12, 1839.—Resolved unanimously, "That the Catechism on the peculiar principles of the Congregational denomination, now so kindly presented to the Committee by the Rev. John Roaf, be gratefully accepted, and be printed under the sanction of the Congregational Union of Upper Canada."

DAVID DYER, SECRETARY.

This document is printed not for *polemical* purposes, but as a means of instructing the young and other partially-informed members of the Congregational body in the ecclesiastical principles most commonly received amongst us. Nor is it intended to carry any authority besides that which arises from its accordance with the Holy Scriptures. Its projectors sanction no religious standard but God's written word, they think "creeds and articles of religion" an ineffectual bond of union, and they protest against subscription to human formularies as a term of fellowship. But they are "ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh them a reason" of their practices, and are desirous of making every proceeding in their churches "a reasonable service."

J. ROAF.

Toronto, 27th Aug. 1839.

SECTION I.

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THE STANDARD OF CHURCH ORDER.

Ques.—Is the particular form of a Church's government a matter of importance?

Ans.—The spirit and tendency of one system may be more congenial with the principles of Christianity and the proper character of its disciples than others—machinery when wanted should be so constructed as to answer the purposes for which it was intended. If for instance, true religion involves a direct reference to the authority of Christ in all our opinions, feelings and actions, that church organization is most appropriate to it which most frequently calls upon the people individually to consult Christ's word, and most fully leaves them to act upon their own views thence derived. So also one system may be superior to others in separating saints from the mass of the world,—in giving conspicuousness to their profession,—in developing and employing their energies—and in excluding an ungodly ministry. The question of *form* is thus manifestly one of very great importance.

Q.—What appear to have been the influences which have given rise to variety in the forms of church government?

A.—Sometimes a desire to fit the churches for incorporation with civil institutions;—at other times a regard to the promotion of particular political feelings;—then again the indulgence of clerical ambition, covetousness or indolence,—and not unfrequently, a worldly jealousy and fear respecting the independence and power of the Lord's people.

Q.—Does it appear that any individual system of church order is of scriptural authority?

A.—The opposite opinion disparages the sufficiency of Christ's word by which we "may be thoroughly furnished for every good word and work," imputes to himself a neglect of

his church's interests in important particulars, and seems inconsistent with the ample and precise directions given with respect to the constitution of the Jewish church. It also opens a wide door for fancy, pride and cupidity; for any and every invention by which pure Christianity may be muffled and shrouded. Besides this, we know that churches were ordered and superintended by inspired apostles, and whether their arrangements were directly appointed by revelation or spontaneously sprang out of the doctrinal & preceptive parts of divine truth, they claim our imitation. As, too, Christ's churches are appointed to be the homes of his people and depositaries of his glory,—the scenes of his operations and means of his converting grace, their order and regulations could not have been overlooked in the establishment of the evangelical dispensation, when he repeatedly in person as well as constantly by his Spirit, directed their faith and practice.

Q.—Is it not surprising that our Lord did not reveal his will on this matter in a plainer and more connected manner?

A.—We have no more reason to expect a systematic order in his instructions upon church government than in those upon doctrine and duty in general. It is enough if by a diligent examination of his word and by prayer, we are able to attain the requisite knowledge of his will.

Q.—Are we bound to imitate the practices which the Apostles sanctioned by their example as well as those which they enjoined in their writings?

A.—It is certain that their practices were conformable with their teachings, that they taught the same practices in the several churches, and that they considered those practices obligatory;

"Timothy shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church."—1. Cor. iv. 17. "So ordain I in all churches."—1 Cor. vii. 17.

Such customs as were local or temporary, as in the case of Paul's vow (Acts xviii. 18.) and the circumcision of Timothy (Acts xvi. 1—3.) were not urged in all cases, and are declared by an apostolical decree not to be universally binding;

"For it seemeth good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things."—Acts xv. 28.

In other cases, the Apostles solemnly urged a strict adherence to their injunctions and customs:

"Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle."—2 Thes. ii. 15.

They commended a conformity to their practice:

"Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you."—1 Cor. xi. 2.

And they strongly condemned the introduction even of small changes without their authority:

"If any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, [as women praying with uncovered heads] neither the churches of God."—1 Cor. xi. 16.

Hence it appears that "at the beginning" one general practice prevailed from which we are not at liberty to deviate:

"If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant."—1 Cor. xiv. 37, 38.

Q.—Are we to confine our imitation to the New Testament exclusive of the Mosaic economy?

A.—Such parts of the ordinances of that economy as were to be transferred to the christian dispensation were incorporated with it by the inspired Apostles and are given to us in their writings. But as it was designed to answer a local and temporary purpose, and was besides unfitted for universal establishment, it is now abrogated. 2 Cor. iii.—Gal. iii. iv. —Heb. vii. viii. ix. x.

Q.—May not civil rulers exact obedience in ecclesiastical cases where their commands do not clash with those of Christ?

A.—If they might, they could introduce additions to christianity quite destroying its purity and simplicity, indeed most of the frivolities and superstitions of popery. The church is "the kingdom of heaven" in which any authority but that of Christ is a usurpation. To pay regard to such authority is inconsistent with exclusive deference to Christ, and at variance with the language and practice of the Lord and his Apostles.

"And Jesus answering said unto them, render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's."—Mark xii. 17.

There is then a clashing with Christ's commands where any attempt is made by civil rulers to exercise authority in or over the church; consequently the case supposed in which it is alledged such exercise would be lawful cannot occur.

Q.—Have churches themselves a warrant to alter their institutions?

A.—Certainly not, or the supreme and exclusive headship

of Christ would be lost. His Apostles "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Since their time none have had either the inspired qualifications or the miraculous credentials which they possessed. Now, as no authority but one equal to that which makes a law can repeal it, we must recur constantly to the law and the testimony, "for if we speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in us." Isaiah viii. 20.

"If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."—Rev. xxii. 18, 19.

Again, if Churches might add to Christ's appointments, where would the additions end? If one circumstance might be introduced, why not two, fifty, a thousand, even till his institutions were completely overlaid and destroyed by human inventions? The Christian lawgiver knew all that would be expedient for his churches; and human expediency is another name for caprice, taste and intrigue—it has been the source of all corruptions and was the murderer of the Lord.

"Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people."—John xviii. 14.

Q.—Have we precise directions for every part of the practices that obtain in true churches?

A.—Certainly not; but what is necessarily and essentially involved in obeying a precept or imitating a practice, must be considered as intentionally included in it. Modes and manners fluctuate, but principles are permanent. Beyond what is appointed by Christ, no custom is binding on conscience or ought to be enforced upon any of his people.

Q.—What then is the authority of churches respecting their constitution and regulations?

A.—Simply an authority to carry into effect what the Scriptures enjoin. They have no legislative power, they can only administer existing laws.

"If thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it."—Exodus xx. 25.

Q.—Would the system of consulting the Bible only in church matters have a good tendency if universally observed by christians?

A.—It would be a grand public testimony to Christ's so-

vereignty. It would (by bringing all churches to one standard) bring them nearly to uniformity. It would remove many causes of weakness now existing in the Christian body. It would be likely (by making us what God requires us to be) to draw down the enlarged operations of the Holy Spirit. It would be putting the visible church in order for the return of her Lord from the heavens. Then,

"Be not ye called Rabbi; for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father which is in heaven."—Matt. xxiii. 8, 9.

See also, Is. lii. 8.—Jer. vi. 16.—John, xvii. 20, 21. Ep. iv. 4, 6.

SECTION II.

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THE COMPOSITION OF CHURCH

Ques.—How were the Apostolic churches constituted?

Ans.—In the New Testament the term "church" is applied generally to any assembly or congregation or collection of people on one spot; a Christian church is such an assembly of Christ's followers. The Christians of a district or province, or nation, were then called not a church but churches, as the churches of Asia, Galatia, Judea, and Macedonia.

"The churches of Macedonia."—2 Cor. viii. 1. "The churches of Galatia."—Gal. i. 2. "The churches of God which in Judæa are in Christ Jesus."—1 Thes. ii. 14. "Unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea."—Rev. i 11.

Howsoever near one another such societies might be, they constituted distinct churches—as in the case of the churches at Corinth and at Cenchrea which was a suburb and sea-port to Corinth.

"The church which is at Cenchrea."—Rom. xvi. 1.

In no one instance is the word church applied, in the New Testament, to any community but such local assemblies, and the whole of Christ's people of all countries and both worlds who will hereafter be one assembly in heaven.

"And when they had ordained elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed."—Acts xiv. 23. "Unto whom not only I give thanks but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house."—Rom. xvi. 4, 5.

"To the general Assembly and the church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven." Heb. xii. 23. "As Christ also loved the Church and gave himself for it. That he might santify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. That he might present it to himself a glorious Church."—Ep. v. 25, 27.

Thus then there are no real churches but in single congregations of Christians—a particular sect in a country, or a meeting of rulers, ministers or delegates from congregations, never constitutes a true or scriptural church.

Q.—Is there any evil in combining numerous congregations into one church?

A.—It is a departure from the language and spirit of the gospel—it is the introduction of the fatal principle of human additions to christianity—it establishes unscriptural officers and courts over the body, and thus modifies the offices and prerogatives of the several churches—it deprives individuals and churches of their free and independent action, and subordinates them to a few leaders who may use them for their own ambition, avarice or political designs—it facilitates the communication of discords, corruption and decay, and consolidates factions dangerous to the liberties and peace of civil society.

Q.—Is the independence of christian assemblies consistent with the unity of the church of Christ?

A.—As individual believers may associate, and yet retain their independence, so may numerous churches be one in their principles,—in correspondence—

"The Churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. 1 Cor. i. 19.

in co-operation for the spread of the gospel,—in the reception of one another's members—

"I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea. That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you; for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also."—Rom. xvi. 1 2.

and in pecuniary contributions for each other's assistance:

"Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea. Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. —Acts, xi. 29, 30.

And christian unity being spiritual, it is seen in these common and reciprocal services more truly than in a monotonous uniformity of modes and ceremonies. The practice of joining whole denominations into nominal churches is detrimental to general unity, as these bodies seldom can hold communion with any societies or pastors besides their own—the system therefore is exclusive, divisive and sectarian.

Q.—Are not such congregational churches necessarily weak ?

A.—No ; for as they can be united while they retain their independence they may as effectually contribute to one another's strength as if their combination were authoritative and coercive.

Q.—What class of persons properly constitute these churches ?

A.—The churches of the New Testament consisted of "saints" or converted and sanctified persons.

"When they had gladly received his word were baptized ; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul : and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as they had need. And they, continuing daily in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."—Acts, ii. 41—47. "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints."—1 Cor. i. 2.

The introduction of other parties makes communion impure.

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness ? And what communion hath light with darkness ? And what concord hath Christ with Belial ? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel ? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols ? for ye are the temple of the living God ; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them ; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a father unto you, and ye

shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty "—2. Cor. vi. 14—18. "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators:"—1 Cor. v. 7—9.

In the best of societies there may be a Judas or a Diotrephes—but this arises from the weakness of those who administer the system, not from the principle of the system itself. We are not blameable if an enemy sows tares by night amongst our master's wheat, but we are if we wilfully or carelessly encourage him to do so; tares and wheat are to grow together in the field of the world, but not in the Kingdom of Christ.

"The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one."—Matt. xiii. 38.

Not to endeavour to exclude impenitent and carnal men is one thing—to be deceived and imposed upon is another.

"And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person."—1 Cor. v. 2—13.

"A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none other wise minded; but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgement whosoever he be. I would they were even cut off which trouble you. For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."—Gal. v. 9—12.

Q.—Is it not assuming a prerogative of judging others and a power of searching the heart to scrutinize the professions of applicants for church-membership?

A.—If it were we should still be bound to obey Christ by honest and decided attention to the spirituality of such applicants. But it is not liable to this objection. If a man requires a society of "saints" to receive him as "a saint" it is reasonable that they should have satisfactory evidence of his being what is required and professed. Such evidence may be found without an attempted examination of the heart—it is afforded in the views, language and conduct of a true christian. As men are naturally and generally ungodly, no one is to be presumed to be a believer till positive indications of the circumstance are afforded. To be moral and orthodox, and an attendant on worship is not sufficient testimony of conversion

and holiness. The credible profession of repentance, faith, and love to God, is what every candidate for church-membership should be prepared to exhibit.

Q.—Is any term of church-membership beyond vital religion admissible?

A.—What will admit to heaven may well admit to the churches. "Grace be with all that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity" should be the language of individuals and collective believers, and

"If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha."—1 Cor. xvi. 22.

Their sanctity is the only recorded characteristic of the members of the primitive churches. Whatever therefore may be the extent or limit of a man's attainments, if he is converted and godly he has a right to a place at the Lord's table, and amongst the Lord's people,—should he subsequently refuse conformity with the scriptural regulations of churches, he will thus separate himself from them.

Q.—Are these distinct christian congregations adapted for the preservation of pure doctrines and spiritual religion?

A.—What accords with the institutions of Christ and the practices of his apostles must be most compatible with the preservation of real christianity. A society consisting of good men—considering "saints" only suited to be its members—entirely dependent upon their intelligence, zeal and holiness—having the power of admission, exclusion, and reformation within itself—electing its own officers, and being exempt from external control, seems more likely than any other body to "grow up into Christ." Its independence enables it to keep aloof from the heresies, coldness and dissensions of other churches. Such a system, too, is most favorable to the propagation of the gospel—as a complete church can be set up in a missionary station as soon as two or three meet together in Christ's name. Judging also from history (which is a public experience and memory) this constitution of churches is eminently conservative of the truths and spirit of religion. For instance, in England soon after the Reformation the Episcopal clergy generally became Arminian in their doctrines and worldly in their spirit, while almost every one of the Presbyterian congregations sank into Socianism—on the contrary, the Congregational churches remained evangelical

and preserved the truth and power of religion which from them burst forth in the last century *within* the English church through the Rev. John Newton (whose mother to whom under God he owed his religion, was a dissenter) and *without* that church through the Rev. G. Whitfield and the Rev. J. & C. Wesley, whose mother was the daughter of Dr. Annesley a dissenting minister, and whose father also was bred a dissenter.

Q.—May christian churches in their corporate character become parts of the legal arrangements of a State?

A.—Were they to do so, Christ's Kingdom would "be of this world," which he declares it *not* to be.

"Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence."—John xviii. 36. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds."—2 Cor. x. 4.

This alliance is entirely without scripture authority not being mentioned by Christ as an advantage wanting in his own times, or to be obtained afterwards, and was predicted by the apostles as a great corruption.

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition. Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or to that is worshipped: so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mysery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming. Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."—2 Thes. ii. 1—12.

It is represented in the New Testament prophecies by the woman committing fornication with the kings of the earth—all nations are said to be "made drunk with the wine of her

fornication"—she "sitteth upon many waters" and "the waters are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues"—she is arrayed in the 'purple' of power and the 'scarlet' of persecution—she is decked "with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand, full of abominations and filthiness of her fornications."

"And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgement of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:—With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And he saith unto me, the waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues."—Rev. xvii. 1, 2, 4, 15.

It inevitably prevents the separation of "the precious from the vile," and confounds the distinction between the church and the world, the holy and the profane.

"Therefore thus saith the Lord, if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth."—Jer. xv. 19. "Her priests have violated my law, they have profaned mine holy things; they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them."—Ezek, xxii. 26.

It deprives the people of God of the privilege and honor of choosing their own pastors and teachers.—It sets aside the christian duty of those who are taught supporting those who teach, thus diminishing the zeal of the people and raising provision for public teachers by means which the law of Christ utterly disowns.

"Let him that teacheth in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things."—Gal. vi. 6.

It prevents the movements of Churches without the concurrence of the civil powers, thus hindering reformations of evil, and retarding the progress of truth. By worldly honours and emoluments it tempts ungodly men into the ministry, and fosters amongst them indolence and pride, and hence error, hypocrisy and worldly-mindedness. The Scriptures often speak of princes serving Christ's cause, but never of their ruling it; they are to be humble menial "nursing fathers and nursing mothers," to "bow down with their face towards

the earth, and lick up the dust of the feet" of the church, and not to exercise their prerogatives as kings in Christ's presence.

"And kings shall be thy nursing fathers and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face towards the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet."—Isaiah xlix. 23.

Thus of "their own proper good," their private property and personal influence, they may cherish the heavenly church. To go to the state for the Church's support is to "cast Zion's maintenance upon her haters"—"to go to Egypt for help"—to say that the divine system is not equal to its proper ends. It is worthy of remark that even under the "carnal" Jewish system in which the Levitical tribe gave up their share of the Holy Land to receive support from the remaining tribes, *no compulsion* was used to procure the tithes of the people.—Strict and minute as were the Mosaic laws not one of them provided a civil punishment for recusant tithe-payers. Never do we read of David or Solomon using a sword to enforce the payment of the Clergy. Altogether then it appears that the civil establishment of churches is unscriptural, enslaving, dishonourable.

SECTION III.

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CHURCH OFFICERS.

Ques.—What were the officers of the Apostolical churches?

Ans.—They were of two orders; one called by the various names, "bishop," "pastor," "teacher" &c. the other by the name "deacon." Paul in sending salutations to the church at Philippi mentions these two classes of officers and no other.

"Paul and Timotheus the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the Bishops and Deacons."—Phil. i. 1.

Also in directing Timothy as to the essential qualifications of officers, he speaks at length of "bishop" 1 Tim. iii. 1, 7,

and of "deacons," 1 Tim. iii. 8—13. making no reference to any third class.

Q.—Do we not read of other officers under the titles "apostles, prophets, evangelists," &c. ?

A.—Of such parties we often read, but not as officers in any of the churches,—with regard to which we never read of more official members than the two orders mentioned in the preceding question and answer. The "apostles," &c. are spoken of in connection with the general propagation of the gospel and not the organization of particular churches; they gathered men in from the world to be afterwards formed into churches, and raised up a regular and stated ministry under whom those churches were then placed. The establishment of a new system, professing to be divine, required the agency of men miraculously endowed and accredited. Such men were the "apostles, prophets, teachers," &c. who having answered the temporary purpose of giving models of church order, establishing churches and appointing a ministry, totally and for ever ceased. This is Paul's explanation of their character in Ep. iv. 7—16: "he gave some apostles and some prophets and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints for (or to) the work of the ministry, for (or in order to) the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man (or a completely arranged community) unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" when the extraordinary and temporary agents were to cease.

Q.—Who were the 'elders' and 'presbyters' in the first churches ?

A.—The word presbyter means an elder or older person. The name was not applied to any single officer in a church, being assumed by apostles who were not church officers at all.

"The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth."—2 John 1. "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder."—1 Peter v. 1.

So likewise it is applied to the bishops or pastors of churches, as by Paul in Tit. i. 5—7, "for this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldst set in order the things that are wanted and ordain elders," &c. "for a bishop must be

blameless," &c. Indeed it is applied to the earlier and senior members in distinction from the younger.

"Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren."—1 Tim. v. 1.

The first fruits of the christian dispensation, the earlier converts, would generally be the senior and more influential members of the churches, and the source whence the officers would be taken. Hence the term "elders" would designate the church officers at large and the extraordinary ministers as "apostles" &c. *without being descriptive of any single order of officers.* Thus it does not intimate that there was any third grade of church rulers, applying rather to the bishops and deacons in common, than to any parties distinct from them. Had there been such a third order, they would not have been omitted in such passages as Paul's salutation to the church rulers at Philippi, Phil. i. 1. and in his account of their official qualifications, 1 Tim. iii. 1—13.

Q.—What were the duties of "bishops" and "deacons"?

A.—The former confined their attention to the spiritual offices of the church, "the word of God and prayer;" and the latter superintended the "serving of tables," especially the table of the poor, Acts vi. 1—4.

Q.—What rule have we respecting the number of persons in each class of officers in a church?

A.—No number is stated either in the directions of the apostles or in the histories of the churches. In the church at Jerusalem, for a length of time, there were no deacons, and yet the church was then complete. They were appointed only when a necessity arose. We frequently read of a plurality both of bishops and deacons.

Q.—Were there no officers or courts extraneous to the several churches to which they were amenable?

A.—There were not. Even the divinely commissioned & endowed apostles avoided the exercise of government in the churches. When a wicked member of the Corinthian churches was to be exscinded, that church itself had to perform the act.

"When ye are gathered together, and my spirit with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan."—1 Cor. v. 4, 5.

When one had to be restored from excommunication, the church had to do it.

"Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him."—2 Cor. ii. 6—8.

A presbytery was the body of elders or officers within one church or congregation as in 1 Tim. iv. 14.—Acts xx. 17. Of no diocesan bishops or synods, or conference do we ever read in the records of those better days of christianity, 2 Cor. i. 24.

Q.—Of what character was the assembly convened in Jerusalem to consider the matter referred to them by the church in Antioch, Acts xv. 1—29 ?

A.—It was totally unlike a council of church officers convened from various places, for no representatives of different congregations were present. It was a meeting of the church in Jerusalem to determine a question respecting which its principles had been mischievously misrepresented at Antioch. That question was of importance because the church in Jerusalem contained several members who were possessed of divine inspiration. These inspired members gave in the church their decisions upon the principle, expressly asserting that they spoke as agents of the Holy Ghost.

"For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us."—Acts xv. 28.

The appeal then was made not because the assembly at Jerusalem was a higher court than that at Antioch, but because inspired men could there be consulted as to the point of doctrine, and the church at large as to the pretensions of the disturbers at Antioch to be delegates from the church at Jerusalem. That assembly consisted of not a collective body of ministers from various churches, but of "the apostles and elders, with the whole church," at Jerusalem, Acts xv. 22, and to prevent the appearance of the Apostles "lording it over God's heritage" the whole church discussed the case, Acts xv. 7. the acquiescence of the whole church of Jerusalem was obtained for the decision, Acts xv. 12—22, and that acquiescence was stated in the written answer to the appeal.

"And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren," &c.—Acts xv. 23.

As therefore no church or body of ministers has divinely

inspired members, no such church or body can rightfully pretend to an imitation of the transaction referred to.

Q.—May there not then be combinations of christians and ministers for common objects?

A.—Yes, as individual christians may (in addition to their duties in the churches) promote the cause of religion, so they may associate for this purpose. But all such "unions," "associations" and "societies" must be extra-ecclesiastical, leaving the organization and proceedings of the churches without restraint or modification. Nothing should be taken from the churches and nothing be added to them on account of such combinations, nor should any government be exercised by them. Thus they have nothing to do with the church constitution,—they are altogether extra-ecclesiastical, separate and distinct combinations of individual christians.

Q.—Then there is a sense in which Episcopacy and Presbyterianism are admissible?

A.—The government of churches by elders is Presbyterianism, but it is a Congregational Presbyterianism—every presbytery being the officers of one church or congregation. As "bishops" or pastors are among these officers there is an episcopacy, but it is an episcopacy not over ministers but over the flock

"Feed the flock of God which is among you."—1 Peter v. 2.

An episcopacy not over a diocese but over one congregation. Indeed in single congregations there were at first often a plurality of bishops.

Q.—Have the "elders" of churches, viz: "bishops and deacons" absolute power in directing their affairs?

A.—Certainly not; even apostles when deacons had to be appointed forebore to select them and called upon the people to do so.

"Wherefore, brethren, look you out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. And the saying pleased the whole multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed they laid their hands on them."—Acts vi. 3—5, 6.

In the reception of members the churches at large were called to act, Rom. xiv. 1. compared with Rom. i. 7. So also in dealing with offenders, Gal. vi. 1, 2. compared with

Gal. i. 2—10; in excluding the wicked, 1 Cor. v. 4, 5; and in restoring the penitent, 2 Cor. ii. 6—8. Even when a person was to be selected to travel with the Apostle Paul, the people at large made the selection.

"Who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace."—2 Cor. viii. 19.

Q.—In what sense then are church officers "rulers"?

A.—They are rulers because, like judges presiding in courts, they suggest proceedings, expound the law, and carry into effect the decisions. Having offices appointed by Christ and recognized by the people as rightful occupants of those offices, they have great weight and sanctity in the churches. The deliberations and resolutions of the members at large are means which they employ in carrying into effect Christ's will, as the verdict of the jury is part of the means employed by the judge who tries a cause in a court of law.

Q.—Are there no "Arch-bishops," "Moderators" "Presidents," or other general officers, over true and scriptural churches?

A.—Not a vestige of any such titles or offices appears in Christ's will—the charter of our christian constitution. On the contrary the apostles instead of exercising jurisdiction over the churches expressly called upon them to exercise that jurisdiction within themselves. They avowed that they would not employ any "dominion" in matters of faith, 2 Cor. i. 2, 4. and notwithstanding the various degrees of endowment they possessed, and the various kinds of employment in which they were engaged, in no instance did they attempt any exertion of prerogative or authority. Thus they maintained the equality established by Christ: "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But shall not be so among you."

Q.—Is this close identity of ministers with their own churches and their perfect independence of all external controul, serviceable to true religion?

A.—Very much so. It represses every tendency to ministerial ambition, which would find wide scope within clerical bodies having rule over numerous churches. It prevents that professional and exclusive feeling which naturally grows

up among classes having distinctive interests and prerogatives. It promotes a more close acquaintance and assimilation between pastors and their flocks. It excludes that servility among the people and that tyranny among ministers which prevail just in proportion as combinations of churches become wide. It diminishes the danger of sects and denominations contracting selfish and limited views of political affairs, and thus becoming constantly dangerous either to the government or the public. Thus it would be a corrective of those sad sources of discord which factious religious communities have raised in the nations of Europe and this Province.

Q.—How are the officers of a church to be appointed?

A.—The only instances of appointment recorded in the New Testament shew that the people *selected* and former officers *appointed* or *ordained*. The people chose the two disciples to be presented as candidates for the vacancy in the apostolic college, Acts i. 15,26. The people chose the seven deacons in Jerusalem, Acts vi. 1—6. Unless christians thus actually selected their officers they could not obey the commands to "try the spirits whether they be of God," "beware of false prophets," "take heed what ye hear." When the people had selected the individuals to hold office, the act of appointment was formed by existing church rulers, Acts vi. 3—6. 1 Tim. v. 22. Sometimes individuals were called out and ordained by churches for special missions and itinerancies, 1 Tim. iv. 14. Acts xiii. 1—3.

Q.—Is any particular ceremony obligatory in connection with the appointment of church officers?

A.—The "laying on of hands" was a customary sign of authoritative appointment in the times of the apostles; it is as convenient as any other for us, and is therefore appropriate but not essential in our ordination services. These services should always include prayer, and generally, if not always, fasting, Acts xiii. 3.

Q.—Are deacons to minister in the word?

A.—As deacons they only have the charge of "serving tables," of ministering to widows and the poor,—but as they are christians as well as deacons they may promote the knowlege of Christ whenever opportunity is presented. When they do this they become evangelists, Acts viii. 5 and xxi. 8.

—Any one who can preach the gospel may and should do so.—See Acts xi. 19—21. and 1 Pet. iv. 10, 11.

"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word."—Acts viii. 4.

But within a church no one is entitled to minister but those who are appointed so to do by their brethren, Rom. xii, 6, 8. 1 Cor. xii. 28.

Q.—What kind and degree of respect are to be paid to church officers?

A.—"For their work's sake" they are to be held in high estimation, 1 Thes. v. 13; even good and efficient deacons are to have "a good degree" in the churches. In the discharge of their duties in accordance with the will of Christ they are to "be obeyed" by their brethren, Heb. xii. 17.

Q.—Does the requirement of the people's co-operation in the administration of church affairs tend to the advantage of religion?

A.—It raises them from the undue depression under which they lie in churches pursuing an opposite course; it leads them constantly to consider and act upon the law of Christ bearing upon church affairs; it trains them to habits of reciprocal submission and government, the exercise of tenderness and fidelity; it promotes sympathy and love amongst the brethren; and brings into the service of churches all the experience wisdom and zeal of their members.

Q.—Is there not a danger of churches so regulated acting unkindly and unjustly to their ministers?

A.—It is not found that this is often the case. A minister being freely chosen by the people may be supposed to be suitable to them; then he has a principal influence in admitting and excluding and expelling; he has the formation and direction of their views and feelings; their reputation and comfort and prosperity depend much upon their deportment toward him; and he is responsible not to an individual or party but to the whole body. When these considerations are connected with the fact that the church is a company of converted and holy men they forbid every apprehension of wrong to the ministers of Christ. Such churches have always been distinguished by their cherishing a ministry faithful to the humbling truths of the gospel and the requirements of spiritual religion. Again, if ministers may be ill used by their con-

gregations so they might be by proud or jealous diocesans, or envious brother ministers. If too there is danger of a church wronging their pastor there is much greater probability of a single man behaving ill to his people. If they may unjustly rob him of his situation, so he may unjustly keep the pulpit and rob them of their building.

SECTION IV.

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CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

Ques.—In what manner is a church to exercise its functions?

Ans.—By a diligent and faithful application of New Testament principles to every incident. No legislative power is given by the Sovereign of the churches to any individual or society—every man is subject to Christ only in his religious affairs, all members of a church are "brethren," and no person or body has authority to lay on a conscience a burden not imposed by Christ. Every member is bound by the law of love, by a regard to the doing of things "decently and in order," and by the cultivation of peace, to accord with the general wishes of his brethren unless a conscientious view of his duty prevents; but that is not a matter of conscience which Christ has not appointed, and however it may be recommended should not be enforced.

Q.—Beside the hearing of the word and the performance of acts of christian devotion, what are the duties of the churches?

A.—In their ecclesiastical capacity the members of a church have amongst themselves to perform various acts of reciprocal oversight and sympathy—and collectively they have to maintain discipline, relating more particularly to the admission of members and the treatment of offences.

Q.—In what manner should the meetings of churches be conducted?

A.—The honor due to "elders" requires that they should

preside, "especially those who labour in the word and doctrine."—1 Tim. v. 17. The proceedings should always be conducted as acts of devotion and service to Christ, not as scenes of debate or discussion, being founded on his warrant, intimately connected with his glory, and by him especially observed. Hence decency and order should be maintained, 1 Cor. xiv. 40;—meekness, Gal. vi. 1;—and impartiality, 1 Tim. v. 21.

Q.—Ought the attention of churches when convened ever to be directed to any other matter than what concerns religion?

A.—By no means; Christ should "be all and in all" and the saints should "know nothing but Christ Jesus and him crucified."

Q.—Have we any scriptural directions as to the particular mode of receiving persons into fellowship?

A.—We have not. All that is imperative is attention to the reality of religion in the person making application lest we "give the children's bread to dogs." In general, satisfaction may be obtained by the testimony of the pastor and some brethren.—Acts ix. 26—28. It is seldom found satisfactory to leave the decision of such cases to any individual, even the bishop; as the painfulness of being known as the single objector is likely to induce a too easy compliance with many applications, while a minister's explicit rejection of applicants is likely to prevent their profiting by his public services. Hence it is desirable to let every case be brought before the assembled brethren.

Q.—In what cases may a church take cognizance of the course of any of its members?

A.—Whenever by so doing it can promote their spiritual preservation or recovery or advancement—whenever one member has a complaint against another,—and whenever the purity of the society seems to require that any individual's membership should be suspended.

Q.—Is the object of church censures the punishment of offenders?

A.—It is rather their reformation and recovery—1 Cor. v. 5.

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."—Gal. vi. 1.

And the preservation of their body as a company of saints. —1 Cor. v. 7.

Q.—Is a church to take cognizance of all offences between brethren?

A.—When an offender sincerely expresses to his brother repentance, his error should not be brought into the congregation; if he does not he must be brought then before them —they are then to direct him as to the satisfaction he owes his complaining brother—and if he do not "hear the church" he is to be separated and treated as one of the world.

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican."—Mat. xviii. 15—17.

Q.—Is not this assuming part of the functions of civil courts?

A.—"Brethren in Christ" are not allowed "to go to law" one with another.—1 Cor. vi. 1, 8. Should the appeal of the complainant and the mediators and the church be disregarded the offender, being rejected, ceases to be a brother and may be dealt with by the civil magistrate.—Matt. xviii. 15—17.

"For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?"—1 Cor. v. 12.

Q.—With what errors among its members may a church interfere?

A.—All violations of the Lord's will; as false doctrine, Tit. iii. 10;—the engendering of divisions, Rom. xvi. 17;—immorality of conduct—Ep. v. 11;—and a departure from scriptural rules as to church procedure. 2 Thes. iii. 6.

Q.—What censures are allowed by the scriptures in church proceedings?

A.—When offenders cannot be reclaimed they are to be "cut off," Gal. v. 12; 1 Cor. v. 13. When there is hope of their being brought to shame and thence restored, they may be *temporarily suspended.*

"And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."—2 Thes. iii. 14—15.

When "rebuke" seems adapted to produce sufficient impression that must be employed.

"This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith."—Tit. i. 13.

Q.—Are church censures of serious importance?

A.—They are; for the censure of a number of holy and kind men acting with solemnity—with the Bible in their hands and after supplicating Christ's promised presence, is not likely to be erroneous. A sentence thus pronounced according to Christ's law is ratified in heaven, so that a transgressor thus cast off is virtually delivered up to Satan.—1 Cor v. 5. 1 Tim i. 20.

Q.—May exscinded members of churches be restored?

A.—Certainly; the penitent offender in the Corinthian church was restored under the apostle Paul's direction.—2 Cor. ii. 6—8.

Q.—Are the censures of churches to be administered publicly or in private?

A.—They would not be church censures in distinction from the admonitions of individual brethren if they were not public. In the New Testament discipline is described as being exercised amongst the assembled brethren—2 Cor. ii. 6.

"Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear."—1 Tim. v. 20.

Q.—Is it proper to bring cases involving circumstances of great delicacy before so mixed an assemblage as a christian church?

A.—When such cases arise, it is easy for the church to commit the examination of the more delicate circumstances to competent brethren who can then report the general result of their enquiries—the decision of the whole being left to the church at large.

Q.—Do any serious consequences result from neglect of church discipline?

A.—If a church is not kept pure real christians will not join it, 1 Cor. v. 11; and those who already belong to it will separate themselves, Rev. xviii. 4. At the same time the sinner is hardened instead of being rescued, 1 Cor. v. 5.

"Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar. Because with lies ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life, Ezek. xiii. 10, 22.

The church too fails to maintain a full testimony for her Lord, lowers the standard of religion, leaves an opening for the entrance of other wicked persons, and weakens her power

of reformation, and of preserving the truth and power of religion;—in short the "little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." By this means also sacred ordinances are prostituted.

"Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things, they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them," Ezek. xxii. 26.

The "name of God is blasphemed," Rom. ii. 24. The Holy Spirit is grieved and driven away, Rev. ii. 5; and the wrath of God is drawn down. "Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? and that man perished not alone in his iniquity." Joshua xxii. 20. "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." 1 Cor. xi. 30.

Q.—May a church so far omit discipline as to cease to be truly christian?

A.—Yes, this has at times occured. "Because thou art lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spue thee out of my mouth," Rev. iii. 16. "I know the blasphemy of them who say they are Jews, but are not, but are the Synagogue of Satan." Rev. ii. 9.

Q.—When a church thus ceases to be truly christian what measures should be taken regarding it?

A.—Every one of its members and more especially of its "elders" is bound to attempt its restoration to purity by a meek but firm and faithful exposition of the Lord's will on the points in which it is corrupt, and by prayer to Him who moves "among the Golden Candlesticks." Should such attempts fail, then every man who cares for his soul's welfare, and his Lord's glory should "come out" of the body as a synagogue of Satan, Rev. iii. 9; that "he be not a partaker of her sins & receive not of her plagues" while every spiritual church should avoid communion with one thus abandoned of the Lord and his Spirit.

"And I heard another voice from Heaven, saying, come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." Rev. xviii. 4.

Q.—Ought we to be ready to suspect the commencement of corruption in the churches?

A.—The tendency of mankind to degeneracy is so great that constant vigilance is required for its prevention. In the times of the apostles one said "the mystery of iniquity is *already* working," 2 Th. ii. 7.—another that "*even now* are there many anti-Christs," 1 John ii. 18—and a third, "there shall be false teachers among you who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of and through covetousness," &c. 2 Pet. ii. 1—3. "The wisdom that is from above is *first* pure and *then* peaceable," and if we would save our souls and those of our households, we must "come out and be separate and touch not the unclean thing, and God will receive us." 2 Cor. vi. 14—17. When the Son of Man cometh will he find faith on the earth? Will he not find many of his people communing with the ungodly; "his servants eating and drinking with the drunken?" "Let your loins be girded about and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord when he will return from the wedding." &c. Luke xii. 35, 36. We should therefore "prove (or test and try) all things," and then "*hold fast* that which is good." 1 Th. v. 21.